THE DEVIL'S DICE

THE discussion grew animated as Edward McLean and his brother Robert discussed the arrest of a noted criminal who had made an apparently foolish oversight in covering up his trail. Edward maintained that it was nothing but sheer carelessness on the part of an overconfident criminal grown bold in crime. Robert maintained that it was the Nemesis that follows all wrongdoing, and held that the odds are against every criminal because the world is arranged for moral ends and must in the end frustrate evildoers. They appealed to their father, who had been an interested listener to the debate.

"It is a significant fact, boys," said their father after pondering a moment, "that there are very few successful criminals. It nearly always happens that a great offender is caught by his own carelessness. If you saw the situation staged you could almost scold him for his foolishness. But the fact that he does *not* take precautions against his own carelessness argues that we are here dealing with something like a moral law. It seems to be one of the peculiar qualities of evil to delude the wrongdoer. The Bible says that God gives up the evildoer to believe a lie.

"We believe that the three angles of a triangle make two right angles, that bodies fall downward, that nature abhors a vacuum. We need to believe just as surely that justice is as inevitable as gravity. Let a man believe that by his sharp wit he can elude or defy a moral law, that he can transgress a moral law with impunity; then in his view of life virtue may be a mistake, wrong may get the upper hand and all things may work together for the good of the ungodly. But in such a universe life would be intolerable. The world is against the wrongdoer. That is what is meant by the old proverbs, 'The devil's dice are always loaded,' and 'He who sups with Satan needs a long spoon.'

"Do you remember what Emerson said about that? It runs like this: 'The league between virtue and nature engages all things to assume a hostile front to vice. The beautiful laws and substances of the world persecute and whip the traitor. He finds that things are arranged for truth and benefit, but there is no den in the wide world to hide a rogue. Commit a crime, and the earth is made of glass. Commit a crime, and it seems as if a coat of snow fell on the ground, such as reveals in the woods the track of every partridge and fox and squirrel and mole. You cannot recall the spoken word, you cannot wipe out the foot track, you cannot draw up the ladder, so as to leave no inlet or clue. Some damning circumstance always transpires. The laws and substances of nature—water, snow, wind, gravitation—become penalties to the thief.'

"You are both right. It *is* carelessness on the part of the criminal. But that very blindness is part of the moral order of the universe. 'The stars in their courses fought against Sisera.' They fight against everyone who does wrong. That is the tragedy of every evildoer: he is fighting the stars."

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